

## What Occupational Socialization Factors Influence Preservice Teachers to Possess Fitness Orientations?

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### **Abstract:**

Purpose: To investigate the existence of fitness orientations among preservice teachers (PTs) and to identify what has influenced these orientations. Methods: The participants were 14 undergraduate PTs enrolled in a physical education teacher education games methods course in the Northeast United States. Qualitative data were collected through autobiographical essays, orientation of self-identification diagrams, and semistructured interviews. NVivo 11 Pro (QSR International, Burlington, MA) software package was employed to analyze data using analytic induction and constant comparison techniques. Results: Twelve PTs possessed moderate (n = 9) or hardcore (n = 3) fitness orientations. Orientations were influenced by three themes: (a) declining physical education quality, (b) elite sport fitness goals, and (c) former head sports coaches and/or current strength and conditioning coaches. Discussion: Faculty must understand the diverse orientation combinations that PTs can now possess and appreciate the acculturation and professional socialization factors that influence and reinforce the development of these orientations.

**Keywords:** acculturation | physical education teacher education | school physical education

### **Article:**

Over the last 35 years, occupational socialization research has suggested that preservice teachers (PTs) entering physical education teacher education (PETE) programs typically possess a teaching, moderate coaching, or hardcore coaching orientation (Curtner-Smith, Hastie, & Kinchin, 2008; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). However, it has recently been hypothesized that a new type of fitness-oriented PT may currently be enrolling in PETE programs (Richards & Padaruth, 2017). Prior research suggests that PTs who possess hardcore coaching orientations are unlikely to embrace conflicting content and messages

delivered by faculty during PETE (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). In contrast, PTs with teaching and moderate coaching orientations are more likely to be positively influenced during PETE (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). The influence of PTs orientations on their learning during PETE has led to the recommendation that programs should ideally only enroll teaching oriented recruits (Curtner-Smith, 2009). However, during the current climate of low undergraduate enrollments and PETE program elimination (SHAPE America and NAKHE Joint Task Force, 2018), this recommendation is a luxury the profession unfortunately cannot afford. Therefore, it is important that PETE faculty fully understand the type of orientations, PTs may possess upon entering a PETE program. This study had two overarching aims to (a) investigate the existence of this proposed fitness orientation among PTs enrolled in a PETE program and (b) identify what occupational socialization factors influenced PTs to possess this type of orientation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Lawson's occupational socialization theory (1983a, 1983b) is a perspective that has underpinned the majority of research investigating the careers of prospective, preservice, and in-service physical educators (Richards, Pennington, & Sinelnikov, 2019). Lawson (1986) describes occupational socialization as "all of the kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and that later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers" (p. 107). Physical education teachers experience three distinct socialization stages throughout their careers, acculturation, professional, and organizational. Organizational socialization was not relevant to this study, given its focus on the socialization process that takes place in the context of schools once PTs transition beyond their PETE programs.

### **Acculturation**

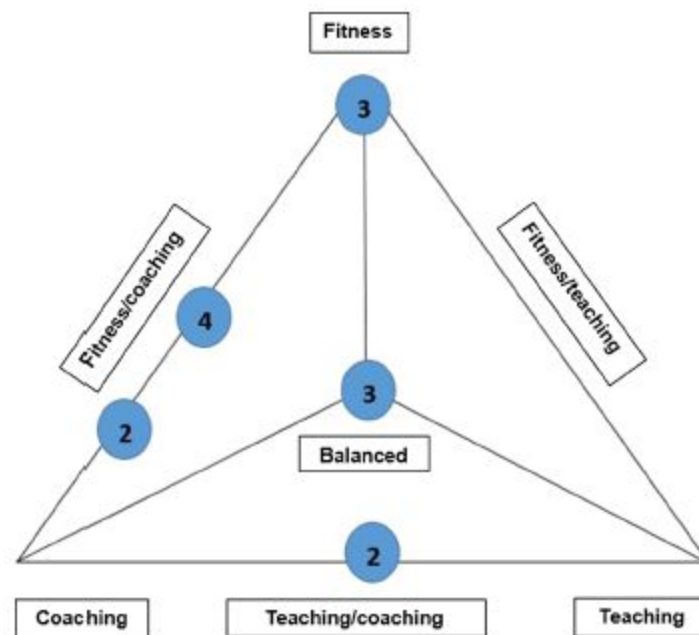
Most of the research conducted prior to Lawson's theory focused on in-service teachers who were already certified, because the training of physical education teachers was attributed to formal PETE programs (Schempp, 1989). However, the mind of a PETE recruit is now considered to be far from a blank canvas, because they have already had their beliefs and ideas about the subject shaped by significant people, contexts, and environments (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Lortie, 1975; O'Bryant, O'Sullivan, & Raudensky, 2000; Ralph & MacPhail, 2015; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). The acculturation stage begins with one's early physical education and sporting experiences, and continues until a recruit enters a formal PETE program. During this stage, PETE recruits begin to develop orientations that are influenced by their childhood experiences of physical education, physical activity, fitness, and sport (Betourne & Richards, 2015; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; O'Leary, 2016; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016).

Throughout the acculturation stage, recruits begin to develop a set of ideologies regarding the nature and purpose of physical education, while also questioning their compatibility with the profession (Curtner-Smith, 2017). These early socialization experiences are referred to as an “apprenticeship of observation,” and result in individuals developing perceptions regarding the requirements for teaching, which is known as one’s subjective warrant (Lortie, 1975). Subjective warrants are developed through years of socialization, because PETE recruits spend thousands of hours being exposed to instructional practices and subject content during their K–12 school years. In addition to this, many PETE recruits also participate in extracurricular and community youth sports, which can also have a significant influence on the type of socialization orientations incoming PTs possess (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Prior studies have suggested that PETE recruits’ orientations were primarily influenced and underpinned by teaching and coaching perspectives (Betourne & Richards, 2015; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). However, it has recently been hypothesized that a third type of orientation influenced by exposure to fitness and wellness aims and objectives during acculturation may also exist (see Figure 1; Richards & Padaruth, 2017).

**Teaching orientations.** If a PETE recruit is more focused on teaching physical education than coaching extracurricular sports, they are considered to be in possession of a teaching orientation (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b). Evidence suggests that these recruits are more likely to be female, previously participated in activities not associated with competitive sport, and experienced high-quality physical education during the acculturation stage (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b). However, there is some evidence to suggest that low-quality physical education can also result in the possession of teaching orientations (Curtner-Smith, 2001), because recruits are motivated to advocate for change, and they want to improve the quality of physical education (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). Research suggests that teaching oriented PTs are openminded, and more likely to embrace and adopt the messages, ideas, and practices that are promoted by PETE faculty (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008).

**Coaching orientations.** Physical education is not always the primary motive for PETE recruits because many prefer coaching over teaching (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Lawson, 1983b), and others consider teaching and coaching to be the same thing (McCullick, Lux, Belcher, & Davies, 2012). Recruits who favor coaching may consider teaching physical education to be a career contingency, and are referred to as possessing a “coaching orientation.” Lawson (1983b) hypothesized that if a recruit’s acculturation period involved participation in high-level competitive sport, with teachers and coaches who prioritized sport over physical education, they were more likely to enter PETE with a coaching orientation. It is suggested that male recruits are more likely to possess coaching orientations than females (Lawson, 1983a, 1983b). Recruits fully committed to elite sport often possess “hardcore” coaching orientations, and are less likely to adopt the values and practices of faculty during PETE (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Sofo & Curtner-Smith, 2010). In contrast, recruits who were not fully committed to elite sport during

acculturation often possess “moderate” coaching orientations, and are more likely to be influenced if they experience high-quality PETE (Sofa & Curtner-Smith, 2010).



**Figure 1** — Graphical representation of the orientations possessed by preservice teachers. Adapted, with permission of Society of Health and Physical Educators, [www.shapeamerica.org](http://www.shapeamerica.org), from K.A.R Richards and S. Padaruth (2017). Motivations for Pursuing a Career in Physical Education: The Rise of a Fitness Orientation, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 88(4), 40–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2017.1280438>

Fitness orientations. Richards and Padaruth (2017) proposed a new orientation perspective, suggesting that incoming PTs may also possess fitness orientations. It was suggested that this type of orientation may have been influenced by teachers who prioritized physical activity, health, and lifelong fitness over skill development. This hypothesis is supported by findings from a prior study that identified PTs who wished to promote fitness, health, and wellness over skill development within physical education lessons (McCullick et al., 2012). Richards and Padaruth suggest that fitness-oriented recruits may appreciate movement, seek to implement nontraditional activities such as yoga, and oppose non fitness-related physical education goals. Recruits with fitness orientations may well be on the increase due to the increased focus on health-related fitness goals in schools (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2009, 2014). As a result of this third orientation being identified, PETE recruits could now be categorized into one of three distinct orientation categories (i.e., teaching, coaching, fitness), or an amalgamation of multiple orientations (e.g., moderate fitness/moderate coaching; see Figure 1). Understanding the power of acculturation and its influence on developing diverse orientations among PETE recruits is valuable to higher education faculty. It can provide faculty with detailed insights into the beliefs,

values, and assumptions held by incoming recruits, which has the potential to increase the overall effectiveness of PETE (Curtner-Smith, 2017).

### Professional Socialization

According to Lawson (1983a, 1983b), the professional socialization stage occurs when recruits enroll in undergraduate PETE programs. During this stage, PTs should acquire the content knowledge and pedagogical skills deemed necessary for teaching physical education. For many years, this stage was considered to be where teachers were initially socialized into the profession. This occurred through passive interactions with PETE faculty who taught them what to teach and how to teach it (Graber, Killian, & Woods, 2017). However, research investigating the acculturation stage provides insights into why many preservice and in-service physical educators teach in a manner that contradicts their PETE experiences (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; challenging task to undo approximately 13 years of acculturation in eight or fewer semesters of PETE. Upon entering PETE, the majority of PTs have spent years observing physical educators and sports coaches, consequently developing a set of beliefs and orientations regarding how to execute their professional roles when they graduate. PETE faculty may promote innovative methods and effective teaching skills during the professional stage (Graber et al., 2017). However, prior research suggests that this stage may actually be the weakest phase of teacher socialization. Faculty often have little impact on PTs, especially when they entered PETE with hardcore coaching orientations (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Sofo & Curtner-Smith, 2010). However, Richards, Templin, and Gaudreault (2013) suggest that if faculty immediately address incoming recruits acculturation experiences and orientations, then PETE programs have the potential to successfully influence PTs during the professional socialization stage.

The purpose of this study was to examine the types of orientations PTs possess within an undergraduate PETE course. This study was novel by considering a hypothesized fitness orientation along with the teaching and coaching orientations that have been previously investigated. Specifically, the study aims to (a) investigate the existence of this proposed fitness orientation among PTs enrolled in a PETE program and (b) identify what occupational socialization factors influenced PTs to possess this type of orientation.

### Method

#### Participants

The overall study population consisted of 14 PTs enrolled in an undergraduate games methods course within the Northeastern United States. Following ethics approval from the university institutional review board, all 14 PTs enrolled in the course provided written consent to participate. The majority of these PTs were in either their sophomore or junior year, and none of the participants withdrew from the study.

## Setting

The setting was an accredited PETE program at a large state-funded university. The PETE curriculum provides instruction about lifetime health and fitness, tactical sports models, pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, and the practical application of theoretical knowledge through a range of methods courses and early field experiences. During a 16-week, academic semester data were collected from participants enrolled in an undergraduate games methods course. One of the authors was also the course instructor, so a departmental faculty member was recruited to be responsible for participant recruitment and consent. The collaborating author was not involved in the course and used his position as an outsider to serve as a peer debriefer. During Week 2 of the semester the department faculty member recruited and obtained written consent from study participants, and withheld the consent forms from the investigators until final course grades had been posted. This ensured that study participants were free to give consent, and could withdraw from the study without coercion or undue influence coming into play.

## Course Description

Students enrolled in the 16-week games methods course met once in a week for 115 min. The course was designed to provide students with the opportunity to research, experience, and reflect upon the content knowledge necessary to successfully instruct and coach a variety of individual and team games and sports across the lifespan. All pedagogical course content was underpinned by the Teaching Games for Understanding model (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). The games and sports taught by the instructor (basketball, soccer, golf, softball, and tennis) were specifically selected for three reasons related to lifespan development and participation. First, the skills related to and the games themselves are often included in grade school and secondary physical education curriculums. Second, they are popular extracurricular activities, which are heavily attended by young people and adolescents. Finally, they represent popular adult recreational (pickup games) and competitive activities (adult leagues) that are often continued over the lifespan. The students in this course completed the following assignments/tasks: (a) a written autobiographical essay (Betourne & Richards, 2015), (b) an instructional handbook, (c) peer teaching, (d) a games performance assessment instrument (Mitchell, Oslin, & Griffin, 2013), (e) entry slips, and (f) a postteaching self-reflection paper.

## Data Sources

Two sources of data consistent with prior occupational socialization research were utilized during the data collection period. First, the autobiographical essay (Betourne & Richards, 2015) that the students completed as part of the course and in which they described their prior acculturation and current professional socialization experiences served as one data source. As

part of this essay students were asked to complete an orientation of self-identification task, where they located themselves on the socialization triangle (see Figure 1) based on their alignment with a set of orientation criteria (see Richards & Padaruth, 2017). These data were collected during the third week of the semester. Second, formal, semistructured interviews (O’Leary, 2016) were conducted after the games methods course had concluded, and final grades had been posted. Each participant was individually interviewed once, with each interview lasting approximately 60 min. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim to text using Temi transcription software. The interviews focused on the participants’ autobiographical essays and orientation self-identification responses. Example questions included, “in your autobiographical essay you stated that you wrestle at a high level. Have your wrestling experiences influenced you in possessing a moderate-fitness orientation? Can you elaborate on your negative physical education experiences discussed in your autobiographical essay, and whether they influenced you in possessing a moderate-fitness orientation?”

### Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analytic induction and constant comparison techniques were used to analyze the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), and NVivo 11 Pro software was employed to manage and code the data. During the first stage of analysis, the authors compared the PTs’ autobiographical essays to their self-identified location on the socialization triangle (see Figure 1) to cross-check for consistency of data. The authors, who are experienced in studying Lawson’s (1983a, 1983b) socialization theory, determined that two of the PTs’ orientations should be relocated from balanced to moderate fitness/moderate coaching. This was because during their autobiographical essays they had discussed the influence of their coaching and fitness experiences in detail, but did not mention their teaching experiences. During the second phase of analysis, data were organized into themes by scanning the data for similarities and relationships between themes. Data that described the type of orientation possessed by participants, and also explained what occupational socialization factors had influenced these orientations were identified and coded. Finally, a qualitative codebook that identified key themes, subthemes, operational definitions, and examples from the data set was developed (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). During data analysis and data triangulation, searching for negative cases and peer debriefing techniques were utilized to enhance trustworthiness (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Data triangulation consisted of using two data collection methods and then validating the data by cross-checking the coding nodes to identify apparent themes and subthemes within the data set (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). A risk of course instructors conducting research with their students is the influence of subjectivity. Peer debriefing was employed to reduce this risk. The researcher not associated with the university checked that data collection procedures employed were consistent with other studies, and that themes that formed during data analysis were influenced by the data set, and not by the course instructor’s prior knowledge of the participants. To address reflexivity, specifically researcher effect, it is unclear to what extent the PTs’ responses were influenced by the fact that one of the

authors was also the course instructor. However, it is suggested that because one author was also the course instructor, this assisted in both the development of the research design and gaining the trust of the participants (Hemphill & Richards, 2016).

Several attempts were made to decrease the risk of researcher effect, and the authors strongly believe that studentship (Graber, 1989) was not evident during data collection. First, the PTs' autobiographical essays were graded in accordance with a course assignment rubric. Second, PTs were not interviewed until after all course assignments had been graded, and final course grades had been posted. Third, PTs were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, a departmental faculty member at the institution was listed as a study liaison, and PTs could contact this individual if they felt they were being unfairly treated while participating in the study. Two techniques were used to limit researcher bias. First, permission was obtained to utilize data collection questions used in previous studies. Second, the semistructured interview questions were developed from the previously collected and analyzed data for that specific PT.

**Table 1** Orientation Type and Examples From the Data Set

Orientation type	Orientation criteria	Autobiographical essay data
Hardcore fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teaching health and fitness is my primary career objective.</li> <li>● Teaching is of interest to me, but I do prefer to focus on health- and fitness-related goals.</li> <li>● As a physical education teacher, I would be interested in my students becoming fit and healthy throughout their lifetime.</li> </ul>	“PE class was fun, but it didn’t teach students how to have a healthy/exercise filled lifestyle over their lifetime. PE got me moving, but I didn’t gain an appreciation for fitness over a lifespan.” (Emily)
Moderate fitness/ moderate coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teaching health and fitness to athletes is my primary career objective.</li> <li>● My interest in fitness has developed from my involvement in high-level sports participation.</li> <li>● I believe that athletes need to enhance their fitness to maximize their performance.</li> </ul>	“When I started to become more competitive with tennis, my coaches and father really enhanced my physical fitness requirements. Mile time requirements had to become lower, strength numbers had to go up, body fat percentage had to go down. So many things were measured and put down as we started to take things to the next level. Every day I was playing tennis for 2–3 hours a day, plus conditioning or weightlifting after for about [1.5 hours].”



		(Thomas)
Hardcore coaching/ moderate fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coaching extracurricular sports is my main career objective.</li> <li>● Fitness instructing is also of interest to me, but I do prefer to coach sports.</li> <li>● As a physical education teacher, I would be interested in developing my students' techniques and skills.</li> </ul>	<p>“Sports definitely made a huge impact on what I want to do with my life. I have dealt with plenty of different coaches and coaching styles throughout my life and they all have impacted me differently.</p> <p>My family actually owns a CrossFit gym and I go there constantly.” (Ryan)</p>
Balanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I value the fitness, coaching, and teaching orientations equally.</li> <li>● Fitness, sports coaching, and teaching all play an important role in physical education.</li> </ul>	<p>“Before I decided to enter the field my idea of Physical Education was narrow minded, it seemed the only goal was to ensure the kids are active for 45 minutes a few times a week. I now more fully understand that teaching and coaching is about laying down a foundation for movement/exercise that encourages them to stay active throughout their entire life.” (Vikki)</p>
Moderate teaching/ moderate coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teaching physical education and coaching sports are my primary career objectives.</li> <li>● Teaching is of interest to me, but I do also want to coach extracurricular sports.</li> <li>● As a physical education teacher, I would be interested in developing my students' techniques and skills in an educational manner.</li> </ul>	<p>“While the main career that I am working towards is teaching, I look at coaching as a secondary career, something that I will hopefully do as an extracurricular where I am teaching. I also think coaching is important as a physical education teacher because it exposes you to specific techniques, skills and rules of the game that can be taught to students. The two go hand in hand.” (Katie)</p>

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## Results

Based on the data collected, the authors interpreted there to be five distinct orientation groups evident within the overall study sample: (a) hardcore fitness ( $n = 3$ ), (b) teaching/coaching ( $n = 2$ ), (c) balanced (fitness/teaching/coaching) ( $n = 3$ ), (d) hardcore coaching/moderate fitness ( $n = 2$ ), and (e) fitness/coaching ( $n = 4$ ). Table 1 illustrates the orientation types with example quotes from PTs. The data suggest that three PTs possessed hardcore fitness orientations and nine PTs possessed moderate-fitness orientations. Two PTs also possessed teaching/coaching orientations, with the data suggesting moderate fitness was not present within these orientations (see Figure 1). This evidence supports the hypothetical claims of Richards and Padaruth (2017) regarding the enrollment of PETE recruits who possess fitness orientations. This is an important discovery within the field of physical education teacher socialization, because it suggests that there are now actually three distinct orientation categories that can be possessed by incoming PTs (i.e., teaching, coaching, and fitness) or an amalgamation of these three orientations (e.g., hardcore coaching/moderate fitness). The three main themes that suggested acculturation and professional socialization experiences had an influence on the participants who identified with the fitness orientation were (a) perceived decline in physical education quality, (b) fitness goals associated with elite sports, and (c) the influence of former head sports coaches and current strength and conditioning coaches.

### Perceived Decline in Physical Education Quality

It was evident that many PTs possessing both hardcore and moderate- fitness orientations perceived there to be a decline in the quality of their physical education experiences as schooling progressed, which supports the findings of a prior study (Vollmer & Curtner- Smith, 2016). Seven PTs possessing either hardcore or moderate fitness orientations stated that their earlier experiences of grade school physical education were more positive and relevant in comparison to high school. For example, in his autobiographical essay Benjamin (moderate-fitness orientation) reflected that,

My fourth grade physical education teacher was always able to make me feel like I was being included and important even when I wasn't in the best physical shape. No matter the athletic ability, he was able to make most everyone feel as though they were getting the most out of the class and he did so in manner that did not make the elite athletes feel superior or the less fortunate inferior to everyone else.

While reflecting on their elementary and middle school experiences, these PTs described their teachers as “caring” about their students, being “helpful” during class, and promoting an

“inclusive” environment that took into account the fact that students had varying physical abilities. During his interview Ryan (moderate-fitness orientation) captured this sentiment well stating, “in middle school teachers would teach the game, lesson activities, and then back to a game. In middle school they actually cared with their teaching.”

According to these students, the teachers did not favor the athletes, and did not overlook the students who were athletically weak. The PTs believed that their grade school teachers actually taught them “how to play,” and they were also able to recall examples of pedagogical strategies employed by their teachers. During his interview, Thomas (moderate-fitness orientation) stated that,

Growing up through elementary school and middle school, the physical education teachers would actually teach the students how to play sports. They made us do little drills, taught us right from wrong, and just seemed to care more when it came to teaching.

Overall, these PTs primarily remember elementary and middle school physical education being a positive, enjoyable, and relevant experience:

I do have fond memories of testing my cardiovascular endurance. I also remember my physical education teachers of younger days gently pushing us through choreographed dances to improve our coordination and balance. Those were quite enjoyable as a young kid. My favorite things, as we progressed in skill and ability, was playing 4 square and kickball, in later years of elementary school. (Dave, hardcore fitness orientation, autobiographical essay)

In contrast, the same seven PTs also described their high school physical education classes as being unorganized, unstructured, overcrowded, boring, and too relaxed. The PTs claimed that high school physical education classes were taught by teachers who provided limited instruction at best. In their autobiographical essays, Benjamin (moderate-fitness orientation) believed that “[high school] teachers put much less effort into what they were doing,” and Dave (hardcore fitness orientation) described his high school physical education as “supervised recess.” It was apparent that many of the high school teachers adopted a “roll the ball out” approach in class, and gave little consideration to the inclusiveness of the lesson. In his autobiographical essay, Ryan (moderate-fitness orientation) stated his high school teachers would get “balls out the closets and let kids play whatever they wanted.” Therefore, it is no surprise that PTs felt their physical education teachers during high school “didn’t care about class,” or as Ryan wrote, “[high school] physical education teachers did not care about their class as much as teachers in grade school.” It appears that this laid back approach may have rubbed off on the students. In their essays, Heather (moderate-fitness orientation) recalled students being able to get away with “minimal participation,” and according to Ryan (moderate-fitness orientation), “in class you

could just do whatever you wanted, or just chill.” These PTs stated that they did not consider high school physical education to be a positive, relevant, enjoyable, or beneficial experience.

### Fitness Goals Associated With Elite Sports

The data suggested that PTs with hardcore and moderate-fitness orientations had been strongly influenced in possessing this type of orientation as a result of participation in elite-level sports. The majority of fitness-oriented PTs had either previously participated or still actively participated in elite-level sports. Most of these PTs had participated in high school varsity sports or elite-level club sports during their youth. These elite athlete PTs stated that sports participation to a high level came first, and that fitness goals were then introduced as a way of improving their overall athletic performance. In his autobiographical essay, Adrian (moderate-fitness orientation) stated that “my fitness experience started relatively late compared to my physical education and sports experiences, [and] I didn’t start focusing on my fitness till the ninth grade.” To progress as an athlete, it was not enough to just rely on their technical ability. Adrian (moderate-fitness orientation) believed that even though he had “superior technique and strategy,” he still needed to be “stronger and faster” than his wrestling opponents.

In relation to the sports or activities they participated in, it was imperative to also become fitter, faster, stronger, heavier, leaner, and more conditioned than their opponents. During his interview, Dave (hardcore fitness orientation) stated that, “[us] athletes have to be strong, powerful, and conditioned.” In his essay, Thomas (moderate-fitness orientation) also recognized the importance of “eating right and weight lifting to keep my body in peak condition” as his youth tennis career advanced. The pursuit of improving their fitness was often self-generated by the athlete themselves during the acculturation stage. As Jessica (hardcore fitness orientation) explained in her essay, “I was in charge of my fitness, and would go running before or after practices to get more of a workout in and improve my endurance.” Vikki (moderate-fitness orientation) wrote that she also worked hard to improve her fitness outside of practice because “she was not a natural athlete like her friends,” and she wanted to “increase her athletic performance.” In a similar manner, Thomas (moderate-fitness orientation) stated during his interview that “I started to focus on my fitness outside of practice to increase my performance.”

### Influence of Former Head Sports Coaches and Current Strength and Conditioning Coaches

The importance of fitness goals on the PTs who were elite athletes was a strong theme within this study. Therefore, it was not surprising to discover that the individuals who were primarily responsible for enforcing and reinforcing these fitness goals were highly influential on the type of orientation these PTs possessed. A common theme was how the PTs’ coaches had improved their athletes’ fitness levels, which ties into the previous theme regarding the fitness goals of elite athletes. As well as being self-generated, fitness goals during the acculturation stage were also frequently enforced and/or reinforced by the PTs sport-specific head coaches. Several PTs

discussed the influence of their high school head coaches on improving their fitness levels for that specific sport or activity. Dave (hardcore fitness orientation) stated in his essay that his track coach “understood the importance of physical fitness to athletes, and required us to perform aerobic, power, and conditioning training.” Edward (moderate-fitness orientation) wrote that he was considering quitting the high school football team due to not getting any game time. However, he explained that his head football coach “encouraged me to keep working hard to get stronger and faster,” and that the coach would “invite the weaker players to come lift and work on conditioning with him in the weight room during lunch and free periods.”

These PTs primarily mentioned their head coaches in relation to the fitness goals and fitness activities they enforced on them as athletes. PTs rarely discussed the technical or tactical messages that were passed on from these coaches. In his essay, Thomas (moderate-fitness orientation) reflected on how his tennis coach “really enhanced my physical fitness requirements, mile run times became lower, strength numbers went up, body fat percentages had to go down as we took things to the next level.” However, he never once discussed any skill-related tennis content or objectives. This is interesting that considering the data collection took place during an undergraduate games methods course. It could be suggested that because these athletes were already technically good sports performers, that the amount of focus on improving their fitness levels had a large impact on them possessing a fitness orientation when they entered PETE. Many of the PTs who were elite athletes discussed the impact that their coaches had on their fitness goals during youth sports participation in relation to improving their strength, body composition, flexibility, and overall conditioning.

Three of the fitness-oriented PTs were currently Division 1 college athletes, with another PT being a former Division 1 athlete. In recent years, two of the PTs had won Division 1 National Collegiate Athletic Association national championships. Fitness goals that had become an important part of their life during the acculturation stage were still extremely important to them as elite college athletes. Data suggested that the PTs current professional socialization experiences via collegiate athletics were influencing them to retain and even strengthen the fitness orientations they previously possessed as a result of their fitness socialization during the acculturation stage. The main influence on the PTs retaining these fitness orientations was the interactions they had with their current collegiate strength and conditioning coaches, whose job is to focus solely on improving the PTs sport-specific fitness levels. These coaches focused on improving the fitness goals associated with speed, strength, diet, weight gain, and injury recovery with these elite collegiate athletes. During interviews, both Thomas (moderate-fitness orientation) and Jessica (hardcore fitness orientation) described their collegiate strength and conditioning coaches as being “intense.” Thomas recalled that his coach “has workouts going on the whole time,” and Jessica discussed sessions known as “Friday Cry-Days, where our bodies and minds would be put to the test, and the coaches would push you way beyond what you thought you could do.”

## **Discussion**

Research into physical education teacher socialization over the past 35 years has suggested that PTs typically possessed orientations underpinned by teaching or coaching ideologies (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). However, the data from this study suggest that a fitness-based orientation exists among PTs, which supports the hypothetical claims made by Richards and Padaruth (2017). It had been suggested that these fitness orientations were potentially influenced by exposure to physical education teachers who had an appreciation for movement and wellness (Richards & Padaruth, 2017) or changes in the physical education climate regarding fitness and wellness promotion (McKenzie & Lounsberry, 2009, 2014). However, the findings from this study identified three different influences. First, a decline in physical education quality between grade and high school was a common experience among fitness-oriented PTs. Prior research on PTs perceptions regarding the quality of their physical education experiences is somewhat inconsistent (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). Many recruits enter PETE having perceiving their physical education experiences as positive (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Lawson, 1983a, 1983b; Templin & Richards, 2014). In contrast, some recruits enter PETE despite having the perception that their experiences of physical education were negative (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016).

There is prior evidence to support the findings from this study, where the PTs perceived there to be a decline in physical education “quality” as schooling progressed (Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Many PTs thought their teachers were too “laid back,” and just “rolled the ball out” during the later years of school. Second, it is suggested that the fitness goals associated with being an elite athlete, and the coaches who promoted these fitness goals during the acculturation stage appeared to have the biggest influence on the PTs developing and retaining this type of orientation. The varsity high school athletes often self-generated their fitness goals and practices. However, they were also influenced by their head coaches, who promoted fitness as one aspect of their overall coaching role. This comes as little surprise considering the influence of sports coaches has been frequently attributed to recruits entering PETE and the type of orientation recruits possess (Curtner-Smith et al., 2008; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009; Vollmer & Curtner-Smith, 2016). Third, the elite athletes who were currently competing in NCAA Division 1 sports appeared to have had their fitness orientations reinforced and strengthened by their current strength and conditioning coaches during the professional socialization stage. The fitness goals that had previously been self-developed, or promoted by sports-specific head coaches, now aligned closely with the practices of their current strength and conditioning coaches, who they interacted with each week.

Assuming the findings from this study are transferable to PTs enrolled in other PETE programs, it is suggested that incoming recruits can now enter PETE possessing a third type of orientation, fitness, one that has previously been overlooked. It is important that PETE faculty understand the diverse combination of orientations that PTs can possess, and appreciate the prior

acculturation and current professional socialization factors that have influenced the development of these orientations. Prior research suggests that PTs with hardcore coaching orientations are less likely to embrace the message delivered by PETE faculty (Curtner-Smith, 2009; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the same outcome is likely to occur if PTs possess hardcore fitness orientations. It has been suggested that in order for faculty to have an influence on PTs during PETE that nonteaching orientations should be deconstructed, unless they are compatible with the content being taught (Curtner-Smith, 2017).

Due to the limited empirical data available on this third type of orientation, additional research is required. The authors suggest three future research recommendations. First, there is a need to investigate fitness-oriented recruits during the acculturation stage, when the stage is having the biggest influence on potential recruits' orientations. Second, it is important to investigate the degree to which fitness orientations impact how PTs embrace PETE content during the professional stage, and especially during fitness-related courses. Finally, there is a need to identify how in-service teachers with fitness orientations perform their current professional duties due to the amount of influence the acculturation stage has on the orientations possessed by next generation of PETE recruits.

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